

First Sunday of Advent
December 2, 2018
Homily for the Anglican Usage Mass
of the
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

The last weeks of every Church year see lessons read at Mass that have to do with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., but which also serve as a prefiguration of the judgment to come at the end of time. As we enter into the new Church year and the season of Advent, we begin to draw our gaze away from history and towards the future, to that Day when Jesus will return in glory. It is in this context that we hear today's Gospel from St. Luke, in which Jesus warns us not to be weighed down with drunkenness and dissipation when the apocalypse takes place. Therefore, as we start our preparation for meeting Jesus face to face, I will talk today a bit about why drunkenness is so wicked and destructive.

The first clue is in the word that Jesus pairs with drunkenness. He uses the word "dissipation," which means the squandering of our resources and energy. Thus, if we think of what it takes to get drunk, we recognize the extent to which it is wasteful both in the material used to get there as well as in the energy required to recover. Nor can we neglect the reality that our resources and energy could be used for something more fruitful and noble. That is, drunkenness involves gluttony, using for ourselves more than we rightly should, which is an injustice; and, at the same time, drunkenness incapacitates us, thereby preventing us from being able to best fulfill the obligations Jesus has assigned to us.

To be drunk, in other words, is to squander God's gifts to us. Not only do we waste the beautiful gift of alcohol, which the Psalmist tells us was given to make glad the hearts of men, but we also waste the particular gifts that God has given to each individual who is drunk. We aren't sharing and spreading the wealth so that more may enjoy God's bounty, since we're using too much for ourselves; nor are we thinking about how we could better use our personal attributes in service to others. So just to use myself to illustrate this point: Imagine if I get wasted every Saturday night, a common practice in many quarters across the globe. How ably could I offer myself to you on Sunday morning? Having squandered on Saturday the resources I could have shared with my biological children, I would be essentially unavailable on Sunday to my spiritual children at church.

Here we should note the difference between inebriation and intoxication, words that cannot be used interchangeably, even though they sometimes are. Inebriation is wholly good, as it implies the lifting up of our spirit that we experience in communion with the Divine. We experience inebriation with the moderate use of alcohol, both in Holy Communion, when we are drawn literally into communion with the blessed Trinity, and when we enjoy a drink or two in fellowship with fellow believers. When our rest, relaxation, and recreation are accompanied by the moderate and moral use of alcohol, the hearts of men are made glad, and we enter into an intimacy that prefigures the communion of persons that we will know fully in the life to come. Thus, we are drawn closer to God, who is love and has fostered our love for each other. That's inebriation.

Intoxication is completely different. As the word implies, to get drunk is to take something good, alcohol, and make it toxic. In taking too much of a good thing, we poison ourselves; but we see quickly

that we also poison our relations with others. For example, the leading cause of death for young people in this country is car accidents. A large proportion of those accidents are alcohol related, impaired drivers who have poisoned themselves poisoning society by robbing us of children with gifts of inestimable value, causing grieving hearts, and tempting their neighbors to extract revenge and retribution. Intoxication is the attempt at inebriation; but it is the embrace of a false sacrament, unlike the Eucharist and Christian fellowship, one that does not cause communion and intimacy, but rupture and brokenness, along with the guilt and dissatisfaction that come with every sin.

As terrible as the consequences of drunkenness are for our interactions with our fellow man, the consequence to our relationship with God is even worse. To enter into mortal sin is to kill grace, to destroy God's life within us; and drunkenness is indeed a mortal sin because it involves the dishonoring of one's parents, stealing food out of the mouths of the poor, and telling lies by replacing a real sacrament with a false one. Moreover, it is a form of idolatry that makes us vulnerable to temptation. Drunkenness makes us weak, makes it harder to obey the commandment to keep holy the Sabbath Day, to remain pure in thought, word, and deed. Drunkenness is toxic to our relationship with God, for through it we imperil our souls.

So think for a moment what it would be like to be found drunk at the moment Jesus returns to judge both the living and the dead. Asked to stand before the judgment seat, we would be immediately guilty of idolatry, theft, impurity, dishonesty, and the failure to prepare adequately for the very moment we've found ourselves in. We were warned every year during the season of Advent that the Day is coming; but we've been found naked and ashamed, like the maidens who didn't bring enough oil as they waited for the Bridegroom to appear. To stay sober is to lessen the potential for a disastrous apocalypse.

But in the end, we should formulate this virtue of sobriety positively. When we are sober, we are in a better state because we are able to serve. And if we are engaged in service on the Last Day, we will better be able to say the words commended to us later in the Gospel of St. Luke, words that must be on the lips of every member of the elect when he meets his Lord in all His glory: "We are unworthy servants. We have only done what was our duty."